



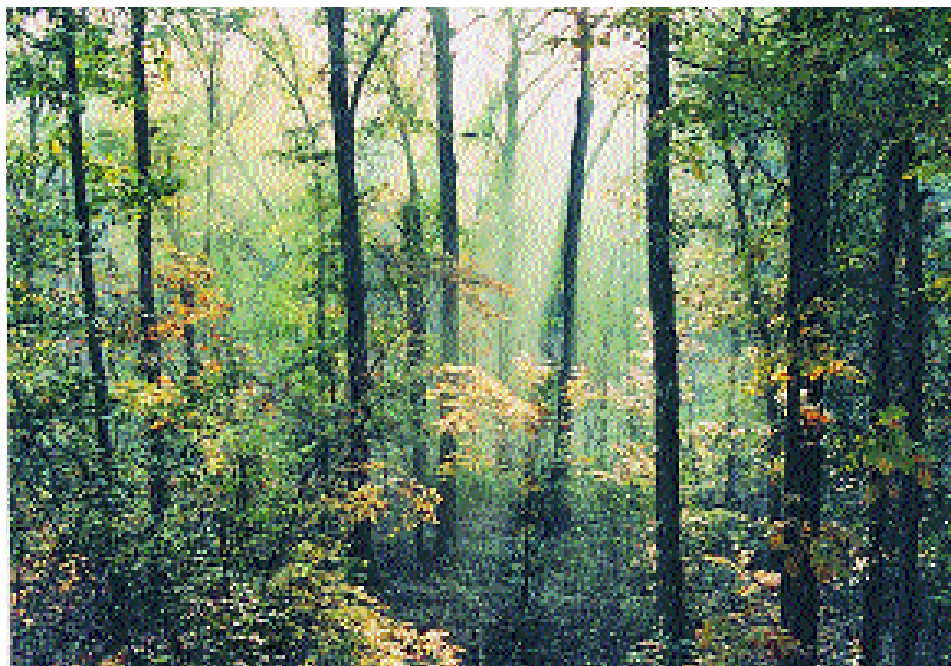
PARADISE

By KIM G. NIX, Editor

Photo by Ruth Ball

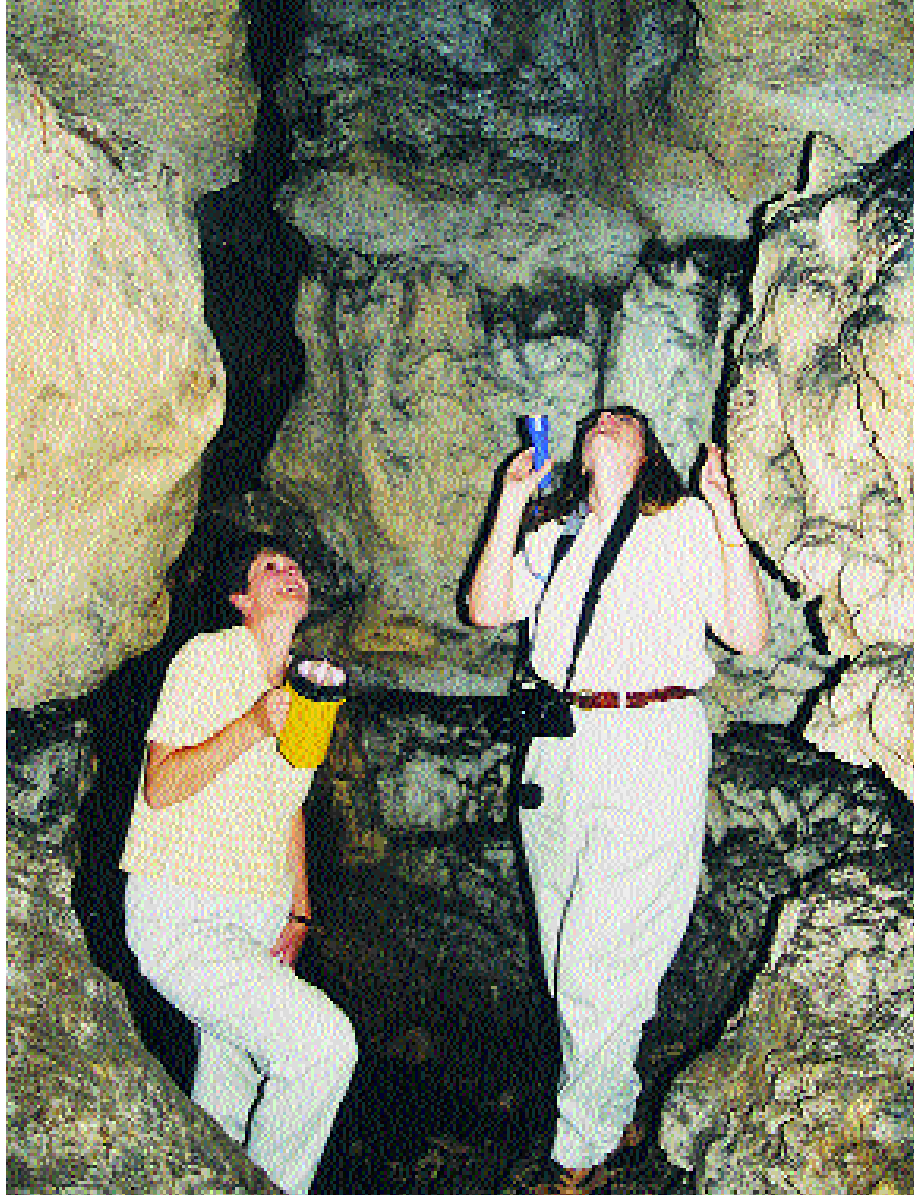
GROWING UP IN ATLANTA, David and Ruth Ball enjoyed excursions to outlying rural areas on a regular basis. Before marriage, their dates included fishing trips and long drives in the country. After they married, one of their long-term goals was to have a place of their own in the country. In 1979 they relocated from Atlanta to Mobile. As luck would have it, they moved just 10 days after Hurricane Frederic hit the city. The couple didn't doubt their decision to move, though, and settled in and began a commercial real estate business, Ball Properties.

Their urge for country life never left them and after a while the couple began searching for some property to use as a retreat. They belonged to a hunting club in Monroe County and liked the location well enough to begin looking in the



Ruth Ball

The view from the deck of the cabin is spectacular in the fall.



Ruth Ball

Ruth's favorite place is the slough area, which is abundant with Easter lilies in the spring. Also found nearby is a cave that never fails to delight visitors. The mouth of the cave is small, but once inside there's room for a small group. The cave extends back more than 100 feet into the earth, and a waterfall and beautiful rock formations greet those who enter the cool hideaway.

These special places provide a great opportunity for Ruth to practice her favorite hobby, photography. "Art and nature. Those are my two passions," explains Ruth. Photography is a natural expression of those passions. Ruth's photos reflect how she sees Paradise—as a

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Those who can navigate the small entrance to the cave are treated to a spectacular view inside.

surrounding area for property of their own. That search eventually led them to Clarke County, where they looked at two different properties. One tract of land was particularly appealing. When Ruth saw the hardwoods, creek and a small cave, she knew they didn't have to look any further. They had found their "Paradise."

Favorite Places

When David and Ruth would make the trip to their Clarke County property it was jokingly referred to as "going to paradise." After a while the name just stuck. The 228 acres was purchased in two parcels, one in 1989 and the last consisting of an adjoining 85 acres in 1990. This is referred to as the "85-acre patch" and is David's favorite because of the hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities in that section of the property.



David and Ruth Ball

place of beauty. She keeps a scrapbook of the property and anyone who visits is fair game to be added to the pictorial documentation! Ruth's artistic side can also be seen in hand-lettered signs that are posted throughout the property describing the different areas.

Managing Paradise

The Ball property was certified as a TREASURE Forest in 1993. They chose wildlife as their primary objective and timber and aesthetics as secondary objectives. "As we worked with that goal in mind, we found that the timber practices played hand in hand with the management of our wildlife," David recalls.

The Balls have worked closely with Department of Conservation Biologist Eugene Widder to enhance the property for wildlife. They put the property in the Deer Management Program with the goal of producing a population of deer with good average weights and are seeing an improvement in the overall health of the species. Ten food plots have been established where a variety of foods are planted at different times of the year. This way deer and other wildlife have food available year round. David says they've concentrated on planting perennials that will come back year after year. Trees such as white oak, sawtooth oak and Chinese chestnut have been planted as sources of hard mast.

Dr. Lee Stribling from Auburn University also made a visit to the property and the Balls are following his

advice in several areas. They've left a strip of low-growing vegetation around the perimeter of food plots. This creates a transition from one habitat to another and provides a diversity in food and cover for wildlife. In addition, some hardwoods were left in clearcut areas and food plots. Foliage was left around the base of these large trees as well.

David has constructed tent-staked cages for honeysuckle that have been strategically placed throughout the property. The honeysuckle, an important deer food, grows around and through the framework.

Permanent firebreaks are planted with bahiagrass and browntop millet. This has helped control erosion on the roads, which was a problem when they first acquired the property.

Where hardwoods were not productive, small clearcuts of 10 to 15 acres were planted with genetically improved loblolly pines. In one harvested area, the windrow composed of leftover logging debris and tops of trees was used as a trellis for gourds. Ruth planted many different sizes to use for birdhouses and crafts.

Since they are absentee landowners, their weekend getaways to the property are usually spent making improvements. "We came to this property with not much but a willingness to work," David said. The existing timber had been high-graded; after thinning, those stands are being naturally regenerated. The Balls also began a prescribed burning program, which has tremendously helped both their wildlife and timber management objectives. "It's real gratifying to see the accomplishments," David says of their hard work. "To be able to share it with other people is very gratifying and that makes the hard work worth while." Ruth adds, "It's a labor of love." Both say their goal is to leave the property better than when they acquired it. The Balls were rewarded for their efforts with the 1998 Helene Mosley Memorial TREASURE Forest Award for the southwest region.

Asked what advice he'd give to other forest landowners, David is quick to recommend professional assistance. "Take advantage of all the talent that's available through the state and other organizations and consultant foresters," he said. Ruth advises landowners to share what they have with others to better educate

them on wise use of our natural resources.

There's No Place Like Home

As both are enthusiastic nature lovers and travelers, the cabin that David and Ruth built on Paradise reflects those interests. The three-bedroom cabin took four years to build. They constructed it themselves—plumbing, wiring, roofing and everything in between. To add uniqueness to the home, David and Ruth were able to procure several items from restoration projects David has been involved in through his business. Wood paneling came from an old boathouse; glass doors from an old store in Mobile; a dining table and marble for the fireplace from historic homes. Instead of wallpaper, one bathroom wall is covered with a collage of covers from outdoors magazines collected over the years. A large deck across the back of the cabin is perfect for viewing wildlife and enjoying nature.

The couple goes on hunting trips across the United States and to countries like Africa and New Zealand. David is an avid hunter, and while Ruth enjoys it also, she really prefers "hunting with a camera." Trophies from their hunting trips, as well as Ruth's photos from the expeditions, line the walls of the cabin. There are traditional animals represented, like elk and moose, but also animals not found in North America, such as the kudu, an African antelope. A bear skin rug in front of the fireplace is yet another memory of a hunting trip.

The Balls originally purchased the property with the intention of sharing it with their immediate family, but their children have relocated to different states. Son Christopher and his wife live in Colorado, and daughter Jessica has recently moved to Maine with her husband and three children. While family gatherings in Clarke County may not be frequent, David and Ruth enjoy sharing their TREASURE Forest with many friends and have hosted tours on the property as well.

David and Ruth Ball have traveled around the world, but they are always eager to return to their TREASURE Forest in Clarke County—and with good reason. After all, it's not everyone who can say they own a place called "Paradise." 🌲



Ruth's artistic handiwork can be found throughout the property.